

## LITERARY ALLUSION IN JACOBEOAN DRAMA

by H. J. Oliver

When T. S. Eliot wrote in *The Waste Land*

When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone (ll. 253-256)

he was relying on his reader's ability to recognize the reference to Olivia's song in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and to fill in the original second line ("And finds too late that men betray"). Only thus would the contrast be clear between, on the one hand, the waste-land of modern civilization, with its dependence on mechanical comforts and its disregard of morality, and, on the other, the conventional, or romantic, or sentimental, earlier world as it was depicted as being, and perhaps only imagined to be, by some eighteenth-century novelists—a world in which female virtue was a fortress to be guarded and in which the sole remedy that the betrayed woman could see was "to die". The literary allusion, including the contribution made by the reader, is, then, part of the *meaning* of Eliot's lines and of his poem.

In an even more sophisticated use of the technique in *Finnegans Wake*, when James Joyce gave as one of the answers to Shem's riddle of the universe ("when is a nam not a nam") "when lovely wooman stoops to conk him", he was counting not only on his reader's ability to recognize the allusion to the eighteenth-century song but also on his knowledge that Goldsmith wrote both the song and the play *She Stoops to Conquer*. Perhaps Joyce intended to suggest in passing that Goldsmith's play relied just as heavily on conventional ideas of the way in which young women were supposed to behave as did Olivia's song; but, of course, criticism of Goldsmith was not his main aim (and indeed there may be other possible allusions even in that one line). Joyce was making a statement of his own but making it through a literary allusion; and, if Joyce is to be understood, the reader must both know his Goldsmith and be prepared to play the allusion "game". Joyce was able to take the risk only because by the time of *Finnegans Wake*, thanks to Eliot and other twentieth-century writers—the poets in particular—the technique was an established one.

Nevertheless we may be in error if we think of this technique as a twentieth-century invention: there is even some reason for believing that the Jacobean dramatists knew it well. The evidence would include such a passage as Giovanni's boast in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633):

why I hold Fate  
Clasp't in my fist, and could Command the Course  
Of times eternall motion; hadst thou beene  
One thought more stedly then an ebbing Sea.<sup>1</sup>

The difference between these lines and those cited from Joyce is that Giovanni's words have *some* meaning independent of any other work of literature—as is necessary for lines spoken to be understood, if possible, by every member of an audience in a theater. Yet while they are self-contained in this special limited sense, they do also invite recognition of the now famous (and probably already famous) lines from the first part of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*:

I hold the Fates bound fast in yron chaines,  
And with my hand turne Fortunes wheel about,  
And sooner shall the Sun fall from his Spheare,  
Than *Tamburlaine* be slaine or overcome.<sup>2</sup>

Once the link is made, Giovanni's words are clearly more expressive still. He is seeing himself in the role of *Tamburlaine as that role appeared to Tamburlaine*; and just as Marlowe's hero was to discover that he was not superhuman, Giovanni's boast is to prove empty. Although the audience may not necessarily assume that it knows what will happen to him, it now sees him as the victim of a *Tamburlaine*-like megalomania and as a far less sympathetic character than was the intellectual youth of the early acts; and Annabella's answer to him is critical in exactly this way:

Brother, deare brother . . . let's not waste  
These precious houres in vayne and uselesse speech  
. . . be not deceiv'd *My Brother*,  
This Banquet is an harbinger of Death  
To you and mee (ll. 2316-2328).

A closely parallel example is found in the anonymous tragicomedy *The Queen*, which probably is also by Ford. Pynto, the foolish astronomer of the subplot, appears inopportunely before the new King and addresses him in the words "my lord the King; My Jove, justice, justice"<sup>3</sup>—words that make perfect sense to a non-literary audience but must recall to others Falstaff's fruitless and equally inopportune appeal to the newly crowned Henry V at the end of 2 *Henry IV*, "my king! my Jove! I speak to thee, my heart!"<sup>4</sup> Pynto, it seems, sees himself as a wronged Falstaff; and if this point is taken by members of the audience, they will certainly appreciate the irony of Pynto's being answered by his King as Falstaff was answered: "I banish you / For ever from my presence".<sup>5</sup>

The kind of literary allusion in question relates to but is yet to be distinguished from both parody of earlier work (such as some critics claim to find in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*) and that "dramatic shorthand" of which Una Ellis-Fermor spoke so well:

The Jacobean knew certain types of stage characters from long association, could, at a hint, presuppose a certain body of characteristics common to all members of the class and be prepared to find in the play before them modifications and elaborations of a familiar theme. The same holds good of intrigue and plot-structure. . . . If we turn to the Jacobean revenge plays, we come upon material written for an audience sophisticated and highly trained in this type of work; it has a firm grasp of the essentials of the character of the revenger-politician and of the usual intrigues. It is ready for modifications—in fact, it will be impatient if it does not get them.<sup>6</sup>

The connections between this "shorthand" and the more limited literary allusion are in the awareness of earlier drama, and in the pleasure given by variation for variation's sake; the difference is that, whereas the "shorthand" assumes only that the audience is familiar with a type or prototype or what may be called highest common factor and need not have any particular "original" in mind, the allusion requires a recognition of specific lines (or perhaps an incident) in one play.

It is, of course, always possible for a later dramatist to repeat the words of an earlier one for no better reason than that he has not enough ideas of his own. Mere imitation is a form of flattery not unknown to Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, and often it would seem to have been adequate to satisfy their audiences. (Of all forms of literature, drama is probably the most given to fashions and runs easily in ruts.) One is satisfied to have, say, the early Middleton's *Family of Love* described as an imitation of Shakespeare, a play in which, to quote D. L. Frost, "the allusions [and perhaps that is the wrong word] to *Romeo and Juliet* stand out like a wall-flower on a bomb-site; a reminder of better things".<sup>7</sup> Massinger's verbal echoes, as listed by Frost, also seem to be mere borrowings. And while Webster is notorious for his adaptations of phrases from earlier literature (including the non-dramatic), there is nothing to suggest that he expected his adaptations to be recognized. It is difficult to see, for instance, how Cornelia's madness in *The White Devil* is made more meaningful or more pathetic because she behaves like Ophelia and uses similar words ("There's Rosemarie for you, and Rue for you", V.iv.71); and F. L. Lucas's verdict is fair enough: "The episode . . . is full of echoes of Shakespeare; some will feel, too full. It is dangerous to call up so clearly the ghosts of Ophelia and of Lear. There is indeed no model so perilous as Shakespeare; it is so hard to imitate him without seeming to copy. But we may grant that if it is to be done at all, it could scarcely be done better."<sup>8</sup>

The Ford passages discussed earlier, however, involve a different kind of relationship to his predecessors, in that they are improved by our perceiving

his allusions; and that is surely in accord with our general impression of his work. Even though he was prepared to risk melodrama at times—probably because he was the victim of another theatrical tradition rather than because he wished to cater for the groundlings—he thinks of himself as a scholar writing for the more intellectual sections of his audience, that “full and understanding auditory” that even Webster thought possible. *Perkin Warbeck*, too, suggests that he was concerned to carry on the Shakespeare tradition by supplementing what his master had written rather than by imitating him.

*'Tis Pity* raises the question of literary allusion to Shakespeare on another plane again. There seems to be no doubt that it was a “rewriting” of *Romeo and Juliet*—but was the audience to recognize this, and if so was the recognition to add to its pleasure? Was it, for example, to notice immediately the parallel in function between Ford’s friar and Shakespeare’s Friar Laurence? Was it to see that Annabella’s nurse Putana had the same moral defects as Juliet’s nurse and even expressed the same sentiments? Was it to acknowledge that the kindly father, Florio, was like Capulet in his more attractive phase? Was it to see some connection between the death of the innocent fool, Bergetto, and that of the innocent wit, Mercutio, each the victim of a hot-headed malcontent who was aiming at the death of somebody else? Indeed, putting all such evidence together and building up, so to speak, a cumulative literary allusion, was the audience to draw the parallel between Shakespeare’s lovers, “misadventur’d” because they came “from forth the fatal loins of these two foes”, and Ford’s Giovanni and Annabella—and hold that they were similarly unlucky because of “a peevish sound, / A customary forme, from man to man, / Of brother and of sister” (ll. 82-84)?

Clifford Leech, taking it as proven that Ford had Shakespeare’s tragedy in mind when planning his own, does conclude that we are thereby invited to exonerate Giovanni and Annabella and see them as “star-cross’d” lovers like *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>9</sup> D. L. Frost—whose argument I do not quite follow—rejects this because “it seems to demand too much from an average Jacobean playgoer” but then goes on to decide that “the parallels are there to provide the audience with novel shocks; the enormity of a crime which no one defends being treated in the terms of a love drama of the previous century”—which demands just as much of the playgoer and is, of course, far less complimentary to Ford (whom Frost classifies as “anti-Shakespearean”: Ford and Webster are said to “reject his outlook as a whole”<sup>10</sup>). Surely, too, there is inconsistency when Frost, acknowledging some of the parallels between Ford’s *Love’s Sacrifice* and *Othello*, writes that “the apparent intention that the borrowing should be recognized needs stressing”.<sup>11</sup> I should agree with him that Ford’s attitude to the lovers is more critical than some other commentators have assumed, but I must reject his denigration of the dramatist with the theory of “novel shocks”.

An audience watching *'Tis Pity* in the theater cannot look up its Shakespeare at the time or even pause, as can the reader of Joyce and Eliot, to check its recollection of relevant earlier works; and that Ford's tragedy does not depend for its meaning, or even for its main effect, on such recollections would be proved, if by nothing else, by the number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics who have expressed their appreciation of the play without even noting the parallel with Shakespeare. Ford would have been foolish to expect every contemporary playgoer to hear his echoes of *Romeo and Juliet*, popular as that play had been (even in print—there were four quartos before the First Folio) but I cannot believe that he did not expect *some* to see the links. Perhaps the truth is that the constant recalling of Shakespeare's love-tragedy is part of Ford's way of *raising the question* of the "innocence" of, particularly, Annabella; and perhaps his method here is a combination of literary allusion with something like the dramatic shorthand described before.

It would certainly be an advantage if we had comment by contemporaries on the use by later dramatists of phrases from Shakespeare and other predecessors. Unfortunately none of the writers of commendatory verses to Ford's plays refers to the question of reliance on others, and Ford himself touches on it only twice and not very helpfully. In the prologue to the late play, *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* (1638), he denies any dependence on earlier work:

*The Fancies!* that's our Play; in it is showne  
Nothing, but what our *Author* knowes his owne  
Without a *learned theft*<sup>12</sup>

(and there probably is little or no direct verbal "borrowing" in this disappointing play). In the prologue to *The Lover's Melancholy* (1629), however, Ford admits and even draws attention to a certain kind of literary indebtedness:

Our Writer, for himselfe would have ye know,  
That in his following Sceanes, he doth not owe  
To others Fancies, nor hath layne in wait  
For any stolne Invention, from whose height  
He might commend his owne, more then the right  
A Scholer claimes, may warrant for delight.<sup>13</sup>

One is at liberty to suppose that in this "scholarly" borrowing he includes not only his use of Burton, more specifically acknowledged in a marginal note to Act III, but also such lines as Meleander's

My braines are dull'd; . . .  
Great, gracious Sir, alas, why do you mocke me?  
I am a weak old man . . . (II. 2702-2705)

an echo of Lear's

Pray, do not mock me:  
I am a very foolish fond old man . . . (IV.vii.59-60).

Whether this is literary allusion I hesitate to say; more probably, I suspect, it is borrowing akin to the way in which Webster's Cornelia speaks in the words of Ophelia; and the more subtle alluding to Shakespeare discussed before may have been a technique that Ford acquired as he developed.

It remains to be asked whether the technique itself was not also acquired by Ford and others from Shakespeare. If Giovanni is made to use Tamburlaine-like words because he sees himself as a second Tamburlaine, or if Pynto in *The Queen* uses Falstaff's words because he sees himself as a second wronged Falstaff, this method of characterization would be exactly parallel to Pistol's constant quoting of what seem to be among the most melodramatic lines from earlier popular drama because, as Leslie Hotson pointed out, he sees himself as a Player King, and struts like one.<sup>14</sup> Christopher Sly's use of "paucas pallabras!" and "Go by, Saint Jeronimy" in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* may belong in the same category: the drunken tinker who does not even know what a comedy is has picked up, inaccurately, a few of the phrases used by dramatists not perhaps of the first order—and the audience needs to know them too.

Similarly, if Ford constantly invites his audience, for one purpose or another, to remember lines, characters, and incidents from Shakespeare's and other plays, is he not doing what Shakespeare did himself, particularly in the "romances"?

The problem here is to distinguish between deliberate reference to an earlier play and a probably unconscious echo because of the dramatist's habit of repeating his own best lines (to put it at the lowest) or of thinking in certain images and image-patterns. One must also be careful, of course, not to import evidence from "bad Quartos", since the inclusion of lines from other plays is a practice of the "reporters". Even allowing for the state of the Marlowe texts, however, it seems certain that Marlowe sometimes made more than one use of his best phrases and ideas (such as his variations on the "Come live with me and be my love" refrain); and it would be a brave man who maintained that there was anything deliberate in Shakespeare's reproducing of the Bastard's "Your sword is bright, sir; put it up again" (*King John*, IV.iii.79) in Othello's "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them" (*Othello*, I.ii.59).

In *Cymbeline*, however, the modern reader is bound to be reminded of earlier Shakespeare plays, not merely by one phrase but by a series of phrases. Sometimes the similarity may be coincidence, or arise "naturally" from similarity of context or of thought. Perhaps it is inevitable that one statement of England's invulnerability:

The natural bravery of your isle, which stands  
As Neptune's park, ribb'd and pal'd in



With rocks unscalable and roaring waters,  
 With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats  
 But suck them up to th' topmast (III.i.18-22)

will recall another:

This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
 Or as a moat defensive to a house . . .  
 This land . . .  
 Is now leas'd out—I die pronouncing it—  
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm.  
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,  
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
 Of wat'ry Neptune . . . (*Richard II*, II.i.46-63)

(and possibly also Austria's speech in *King John*, II.i.22-28, and Faulconbridge's famous finale to that play). Comparable in this respect would be the words of Pericles to Marina:

Yet thou dost look  
 Like Patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling  
 Extremity out of act (*Pericles*, V.i.136-138)—

surely reminiscent, in whatever way, of Viola's

She sat like Patience on a monument,  
 Smiling at grief (*Twelfth Night*, II.iv.113-114).<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps Iachimo's description to himself of his own movement in Imogen's bedchamber:

Our Tarquin thus  
 Did softly press the rushes, ere he waken'd  
 The chastity he wounded (*Cymbeline*, II.ii.12-14)

is a classical allusion, a reference to Roman "history" rather than to Shakespeare's own poem—but one must doubt it when one notices also the parallels to *Venus and Adonis*, cited, for example, by the New Arden editor, J. M. Nosworthy.

It is even more difficult to believe that Shakespeare could have written for Imogen:

Against self-slaughter  
 There is a proposition so divine  
 That cravens my weak hand (III.iv.74-76)

and not have known that some at least of his audience would think of Hamlet's

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! (*Hamlet*, I.ii.131-132).

Mr. Nosworthy, noting the parallel, calls the *Cymbeline* phrase "a somewhat

pointless echo of *Hamlet*" (p. lxvi)—and so concedes that the echo was deliberate, even if he cannot see why it is there.

Nosworthy also notes (p. 68n.) that Posthumus's account of the story woven in the tapestry of Imogen's bedchamber, of

Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman  
And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for  
The press of boats or pride (II.iv.70-72)

"glances at Enobarbus's account of the scene in *Ant.* II.ii.195-223" and adds that it "makes similar use of the pathetic fallacy". But is that all? Does it not also hope that the auditor's memories of the earlier passage will contribute something to the color and the erotic atmosphere of this new scene?

More interesting still is Cymbeline's "justification" of his refusal to pay tribute to Rome:

Caesar's ambition—  
Which swell'd so much that it did almost stretch  
The sides o' th' world—against all colour here  
Did put the yoke upon's; which to shake off  
Becomes a warlike people, whom we reckon  
Ourselves to be. (III.i.47-52)

The lines will presumably be taken at their surface value by all who believe Cymbeline to be the true hero of the play and to be also Shakespeare's spokesman for the cause of British nationalism. Yet Cymbeline is presented quite unsympathetically at times; and the play contains Shakespeare's clearest *rejection* of British parochialism:

Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day? Night?  
Are they not but in Britain? I' th' world's volume  
Our Britain seems as of it, but not in't;  
In a great pool a swan's nest. Prithce think  
There's livers out of Britain. (III.iv.135-139)

Is it, then, barely possible that when he wrote Cymbeline's lines Shakespeare was thinking back to the ironical use his own Antony had made of Brutus's claim that Caesar was ambitious—and so "undercutting" Cymbeline too?

Most intriguing of all are the lines given to Philario when he is urging Posthumus to be cautious before accepting Iachimo's possession of Imogen's bracelet as proof of her adultery:

It may be probable she lost it, or  
Who knows if one her women,<sup>16</sup> being corrupted,  
Hath stol'n it from her? (II.iv.115-117)

Shakespeare can hardly *not* be thinking of Emilia's "theft" of Desdemona's handkerchief in *Othello*; and, to put it crudely, the effect on me of Philario's question is almost as if he had said to Posthumus, "Haven't you seen *Othello*?"

But why would Shakespeare take that risk? Did he *invite* that response? I



do not know, and can only record the possible explanation that this is a Brechtian way of telling us that a play is a play is a play and not an image of reality. It may be relevant to add that Granville-Barker has made just that claim for another feature of the "Romances," their anachronisms:

... but why cultivate an archaeological conscience towards *Cymbeline's* Britain and such a story as this? Shakespeare knew as well as we know that war chariots and the god Jupiter did not fit with a Posthumus made Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber, who waves his farewells with hat and glove and handkerchief, with a Cloten who fights duels and plays at bowls, a Belarius who talks of rustling at Court in unpaid-for silks, a Guiderius joking about a tailor, an Imogen disguised in doublet and hose; and—if he had stopped to think about it—that in a Rome over which Augustus Caesar ruled, Frenchmen, Dutchmen and Spaniards would not be found discussing their country mistresses, or an Iachimo making a bet of ten thousand ducats. We commonly say he was careless about these things; it is a very fertile carelessness that shows here. For from this collection of inconsistencies emerges a quite definite picture all illuminative of the fantasy of the story. In a work of art, for what other consistency should we ask?<sup>17</sup>

The Elizabethan dramatists do seem to have known the technique of "distancing", of forbidding the audience to identify itself too closely with the characters of the play or any one of them—as Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* illustrates very well. Unlike Brecht, perhaps, they seem to have known also that much is lost if the audience is told too often that it is, after all, in a theater; and conceivably the literary allusions (and the accumulated anachronisms) are a subtler way of obtaining the desired effect. Alternative explanations of the phenomenon are certainly no more satisfactory. One can hardly be content to believe, without further evidence, that Shakespeare was simply growing old and that, in the fashion of old men, he derived pleasure from thinking back on the triumphs of his youth. He was, in fact, only in his forties when he wrote *Cymbeline*; and *Antony and Cleopatra* and even *Hamlet* and *Othello* were not so very far in the past. A Strachey-ish argument that the late Shakespeare was bored with everything except poetry and careless about everything except poetic effect, or a theory that he was merely amusing himself by these references to earlier plays, would also seem to be inadequate to explain what one may call, adapting Granville-Barker's word, the "fertility" of this harking-back.

On the whole, the evidence suggests that the Elizabethans were quick to accept the works of their own age as forming part of the *corpus* of literature to which it was appropriate to make what may be described, for want of a better word, as literary "reference." Such reference would not have been significant to every member of an audience—but then one does not imagine that every "understanding" gentleman in the pit saw the point of an allusion to Diana's rangers either. He is more likely to have known his *Hamlet*.

Since the difference between literary allusion and mere borrowing or echoing comes from the intention of reminding the audience of another work, and since by hypothesis we can only *infer* any author's intention from the

work of literature, unless he has made a specific statement about his methods, discussion of the phenomenon of literary allusion in Shakespeare and his contemporaries is bound to be inconclusive. It does seem probable, however, that Shakespeare's allusions to himself, and some of the references by Ford and later dramatists to the works of Shakespeare and Marlowe and others of their predecessors, anticipate a technique that has not been widely recognized as what it is until the twentieth century.

## NOTES

1. *'Tis Pity*, ed. H. De Vocht (*Materials for the Study of the Old English Drama*, N.S., Vol. I, Louvain, 1927), ll. 2311-2314.

2. *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford, 1910), ll. 369-372.

3. *The Queen*, ed. W. Bang (*Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas*, XIII, Louvain, 1906), ll. 3756-3758.

4. The quotations from Shakespeare throughout this article are from the *Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London, 1951).

5. I first drew attention to this in my *The Problem of John Ford* (Melbourne, 1955), p. 76, and cited other possible examples of the same device.

6. Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama* (1936; second edition revised, London, 1947), pp. 281-282.

7. D. L. Frost, *The School of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 33.

8. *The Complete Works of John Webster* (London, 1927), Vol. I, p. 262, note on ll. 60 ff.

9. Clifford Leech, *John Ford and the Drama of his Time* (London, 1957), p. 56.

10. Frost, *School of Shakespeare*, pp. 158, 159, 119.

11. Frost, p. 161. Incidentally, R. Davril, in "Shakespeare and Ford", *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 94 (1958), 121-131, does not ever really ask why Ford should have wanted to echo Shakespeare.

12. Ed. De Vocht (*Materials for the Study of the Old English Drama*, Vol. I), p. 250. Roman and italic type reversed.

13. *John Fordes Dramatische Werke*, ed. W. Bang (*Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas*, XXIII, Louvain, 1908).

14. Leslie Hotson, "Ancient Pistol", *Yale Review* 38 (1948), 51-68.

15. The parallel has been commented on by Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare as Collaborator* (London, 1960), p. 94, mainly for its relevance to Shakespeare's authorship of *Pericles*; and by G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life* (London, 1947), p. 65, for its connotations—but neither critic considers the possibility of allusion.

16. The F2 reading "one of her women" is generally preferred.

17. Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Second Series (London, 1930), p. 256.